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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ MAY QUITO 1204
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SUBJECT: CHILEAN BROADCAST ON PACIFIC WAR MEETS MEASURED
RESPONSE

REF: LIMA 1588

Summary:

¶1. Reaction in Peru to the first installment of "The Epic," a Chilean-produced documentary on the War of the Pacific between Chile and Peru-Bolivia (1879-1884) that aired May 6, was measured and anticlimatic. After the right-wing tabloid press's advance portrayal of the work as a distortion of history designed to intimidate Peru in its maritime dispute with Chile, the first part of the film itself was praised by many Peruvian commentators for its relative objectivity. President Garcia derided those who'd beat the war drums in the months leading up to the broadcast as having created a "bogey man" that the screening had dispelled. Peru's mature reaction to the broadcast augurs well for its continued constructive relations with Chile. End Summary.

¶2. The long-awaited broadcast of the multi-part, Chilean-produced documentary on the War of the Pacific between Chile and Peru-Bolivia (1879-1884), "The Epic" (Epopeya), took place on Sunday, 5/6. Since March, elements in the right-wing, nationalist press, led by the pro-Fujimori tabloid "La Razon," have decried the documentary as everything from Chilean propaganda and a savage and brutal portrayal of Peruvians to a veiled warning that Peru had to yield to Chile in their ongoing maritime border dispute (Ref) or face another military conflict. Tensions over the pending documentary grew to such a level that both the Peruvian and Chilean Foreign Ministries moved to delay its showing, for fear of aggravating Peru-Chilean tensions as Peru pursues solutions to its maritime boundary disagreement with Chile.

¶3. The reaction to the actual broadcast in the mainstream press has provided a welcome anti-climax to the somewhat hysterical build-up. Samples follow:

--Catholic University Historian Christobal Aljovin praised the documentary as "relatively well done." He noted some oversights but praised the efforts of the producers to take into account Peruvian and Bolivian viewpoints on the conflict. He characterized the work as, in part, an attempt to improve the image of the Chilean military with the country's own people. (Note: Aljovin has participated constructively in PAS-sponsored U.S. History programs as a commentator. End Note.)

--Sociologist Sinesio Lopez said the work was "better than expected" and, while presenting a Chilean view of the war, it also revealed that people in all three countries had much to

learn about this historic conflict.

--Major Lima Daily "La Republica" stated that "too many (negative) expectations" had accompanied the broadcast, and praised Chilean National Television (TVN) for "searching for balance" between the viewpoints of the three parties in the conflict.

--President Alan Garcia, who stated that he had yet to see the program, lauded its broadcast as "a good thing" because it would allow Peruvians to escape from "the bogey man" (i.e. the exaggerated controversy) that had been stoked in the film's anticipation. Garcia said that there was nothing in the documentary that would endanger Peru's positive relations with Chile.

Comment:

14. Anti-Chilean feelings always remain latent in Peru, and both right and left-wing interests are always eager to stir them. Nonetheless, the anti-climax to Epopeya's broadcast reinforces the moderate course of sustained, constructive engagement that the Garcia Administration has followed with Chile. In addition, the quality of the documentary itself appears to be sending an important message: that even painful historical events can be treated in an even-handed and dispassionate manner. The measured reaction to the first installment of the film reflects a growing maturity on the part of Peruvian audiences. According to Chilean Embassy officials, this maturity will be further tested in the next two installments.

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